

NOV 15 1966

Approved For Release 1999/09/17 : CIA-RDP75-00149R0004

Czechs Seize American on Plane

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U.S. Protests Emigre Arrest On Spy Charges

Travel Executive Taken From Soviet Airliner in Prague

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN
Star Staff Writer

A Cambridge, Mass., travel executive was seized on a Soviet airliner by Czechoslovak police two weeks ago and is being held incommunicado on charges of high treason, espionage and attempted murder.

The U.S. government has made strong representations to the Czechoslovak government over the case, but so far no U.S. official has been able to see the man, Vladimir J. Kazan-Komarek, president of the Harvard Travel Service. He is a 42-year-old Czechoslovak emigre who is an American citizen.

Because it was hoped Prague officials might release Kazan if there was no publicity, the State Department decided not to make the case public. Czech news media, however, already have printed the fact of Kazan's arrest—but significantly omit the hijacking aspects.

In this country he is known as "Kazan," but in Czechoslovakia his name was "Komarek."

Arrived in Moscow

According to accounts pieced together by The Star, this is what happened:

On Oct. 24, Kazan arrived in Moscow at the invitation of Intourist, the Soviet travel agency. Approved For Release 1999/09/17 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000400290008-2
Travel Service, Kazan was an

official Intourist agent in the United States—meaning, he was authorized to sell travel vouchers to American tourists wishing to visit the Soviet Union.

On Oct. 31, after a week of meetings with Intourist officials, Kazan left Moscow on a non-stop Aeroflot flight to Paris. Aeroflot is the state-owned Soviet airline.

While in the air, the passengers were informed that the plane would have to make an emergency landing in Prague. The unscheduled stop was made, and while on the ground, Czechoslovak security police (the STB) arrested Kazan.

As he was being taken away, Kazan asked another passenger to inform U.S. authorities.

Czechoslovak Note

The passenger phoned the U.S. Embassy in Paris, which relayed the information to the State Department. The U.S. Embassies in Moscow and Prague were asked to check, and on Nov. 3, the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry said in a note:

"Vladimir Komarek (Kazan) was arrested on Oct. 31 at Prague Airport during the emergency landing of an Aeroflot plane.

"A warrant for his arrest was issued in 1963 for crimes of high treason, espionage and attempted murder."

He was also charged with having established "a treasonable organization in connection with foreign agents which was aimed at subversion of the government."

The note said that he had provided his organization with firearms, transmitters and money and that a Czechoslovak policeman was killed by his organization.

The Foreign Ministry said Kazan was sent to Czechoslovakia on hostile missions and on his last crossing of the border he used firearms against a border guard.

Escaped to France

A later broadcast by the Prague radio said these actions took place between 1948 and 1951. At that time, Kazan lived in France. He did not emigrate to the United States until 1955 and he was naturalized in 1960. He had escaped to France in 1948 when the Communists took over.

During the first years of Communist power, it is known that anti-Communist emigre groups were working in France and West Germany, primarily involved in helping smuggle non-Communists out of Czechoslovakia.

Competent authorities here say that there is no record of Kazan's working with the Central Intelligence Agency at any time. But they say it is possible he worked with French authorities.

Following receipt of the note, the U.S. Embassy in Prague immediately asked that a consular official be allowed to meet with Kazan. There has been no reply.

On Nov. 8, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs John M. Leddy called in Czechoslovak Ambassador Karel Duda and told him of the seriousness with which the United States viewed the case. The ambassador's assistance was sought for getting prompt consular access and a speedy and effective resolution of the case—diplomatic language meaning the United States wanted him returned.

Family Notified

Kazan's family has been notified in Cambridge, and both senators, Leverett Saltonstall and Edward M. Kennedy, have had their staffs inquire at the State Department on the case.

Apparently, he was tried in absentia in 1963 on the charges specified by the Czechoslovak note. It is not known whether he has been sentenced—or what the sentence would be—although the death penalty is possible in high

reason cases.

There is an extra wrinkle to the case, it was learned.

Kazan has an elderly mother in Prague. Earlier this year, when she was ill, he wrote the Czechoslovak Embassy here for a visa. After some correspondence, he was issued one, although on this trip, he did not plan to stop in Prague.

Soviet authorities have insisted that the plane did have mechanical problems, but most U.S. officials are extremely skeptical, and believe the landing was part of an operation involving the security agencies of both Red countries.

Officials Concerned

U.S. officials are very concerned about the whole case. Privately they say it is one of the worst Cold War incidents of recent years, and cannot help but hurt President Johnson's attempts to improve relations with Eastern Europe.

This is the second incident involving Czechoslovak security groups to cause a mixture of anger and incredulity in Washington. The other was the attempt last July to plant a listening device in the office of Raymond Lisle, director of the Bureau of Eastern European Affairs.

Ironically, the Czechoslovak government has been trying hard in recent months to improve relations with the United States. A special travel supplement was published recently in the New York Times, urging Americans to visit Czechoslovakia, and businessmen have been wooed in an effort to increase trade.